



Hummingbird Sports co-founders Rob Stolker (left) and Jared Kaban with Stickbenders girls' lacrosse players testing their new headgear product. (Twitter)

## Hummingbird Flies into Lacrosse Industry with Headgear

by **Matt DaSilva** | [USLaxMagazine.com](http://USLaxMagazine.com) | [Twitter](https://twitter.com)

Rob Stolker knew nothing about women's lacrosse or the contentious conversation about headgear that has hovered over the sport since the 1980s. All he knew was what he saw: the youngest two of his four daughters playing a stick-and-ball sport without any equipment to protect them from a potential head injury.

"I let them finish the hour of that practice, but they have not been back on a lacrosse field since," said Stolker, 46, of Holmdel, N.J. "I still think about why it was that I even let them finish out that hour."

In truth, when taught and played properly, women's lacrosse is no more dangerous than other sports. A review of NCAA data from 2004 to 2014 showed that women's lacrosse had the seventh-highest rate of concussions in competition, trailing wrestling, football, men's ice hockey, field hockey, women's soccer and women's ice hockey. At the high school level, girls' lacrosse ranked fifth in concussions during the 2013-14 academic year, trailing football, boys' ice hockey, boys' lacrosse and girls' soccer.

Governing bodies for soccer and field hockey do not mandate protective headgear for field play. US Lacrosse, NFHS and NCAA rules allow for optional use of the equipment.

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But as Stolker found out in spring of 2014, there were no products for his daughters to wear. He also learned that US Lacrosse and ASTM had drafted a performance standard that would guide manufacturers in developing products tailored specifically to the women's game and address the most common mechanisms of head injuries, like stick-to-head contact. ASTM approved the standard May 21, 2015, at its biannual meeting in Anaheim, Calif.

The timing was perfect. Stolker, a real estate investor and manager, started Hummingbird Sports, an equipment and apparel company that caters specifically to female athletes. On Sept. 20, the company released its first product: The Hummingbird, the first women's lacrosse headgear to meet the rigorous new ASTM performance standard F3137.

Cascade Lacrosse, the leading men's lacrosse helmet manufacturer, launched its women's headgear product, the LX, six weeks later.

"There will never be another first," said Bob Colburn, director of marketing for Hummingbird Sports.

While the LX offers an integrated soft outer shell, which is comfortable with existing eyewear, Colburn said consumers should have choices and believes there will be enough demand to sustain both brands.

Colburn, a veteran of the sporting goods industry and one-time executive vice president for Cascade Lacrosse, and Sander Reynolds, a product development consultant, helped connect Stolker and Hummingbird Sports co-founder Jared Kaban with manufacturers and retailers. Susie Deignan, a senior global merchandising for Converse, also came on board as a managing partner.

"When Rob came to us with this idea, we were doing it no matter what. It was the right thing," said Kaban, who previously partnered with Stolker on ventures in real estate and solar panel installation. "The [ASTM] standard gave us something to shoot for. We immersed ourselves in the industry."

"We have a lot of passion in this group and a lot of talent from diverse backgrounds," Deignan said.

Stolker knew Kaban and Deignan, both of whom have daughters who play sports, could identify with his brand vision of empowering female athletes. Stolker's daughters also have played basketball, softball, field hockey and volleyball. He is the vice president of the Holmdel Youth Activities Association. Along his way in youth sports, Stolker noticed unequal treatment of boys and girls.

"I was coaching them in basketball and flat-out was told, 'You're not going to get your gym time, because nobody cares about the girls.' My 10th-grader now is a really good basketball player, not all that tall. When she wears her basketball shorts, she folds them over three times," Stolker said. "When I talk to girls' lacrosse players and tell that story, they instantly point to their pinnies and start talking about other sports. Those things that you're wearing were made for boys. Somebody says just pink it and shrink it and throw it on the girls. That just doesn't cut it anymore."



While Hummingbird Sports does produce apparel, its flagship product is its women's lacrosse headgear. In addition to the soft outer shell required to pass the deformation test in accordance with ASTM F3137, the harder inner shell offers 360 degrees of protection. The Hummingbird also utilizes Windpact's Crash Cloud technology, an impact absorption system containing pods full of air that release pressure based on the magnitude of force. A ponytail port and 18 ventilation slots supply comfort, while the design also provides compatibility with protective eyewear — which, unlike headgear, is mandatory per US Lacrosse, NFHS and NCAA rules.

"As much as we care about their safety, we also care about the way they want to look," Deignan said. "They want to look tough and they want to look good."

With the Hummingbird (\$19) and LI (\$49), now available online and at retail stores, players can augment their team uniforms and other players across the country will return to the lacrosse field next spring with the option of wearing headgear designed and tested specifically for the sport. Testing requirements include a 45-mph stick swing simulation and a 60-mph ball impact.

The Florida High School Athletic Association, which mandated headgear for girls' lacrosse before the 2015 season, will allow only ASTM-approved products starting in 2018.

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